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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"*****"

"Saying it like it is!"

Well, I was planning to skip talking about politics, like the economy and stuff like that. I'. going to renege on that thought, but just very briefly. Yes, we're all really ticked off about the AIG bonuses. Bail out the company, and what do they do with some of that money - give exorbitant bonuses! Yes, it's a slap in the face to all of us, and not just some ordinary slap! AIG says that these bonus payments were put together in contracts designed before the bailout. So who do I blame, other than AIG? I place part of the blame on those who approved helping out AIG. Not that I disapprove of the aid, but I do see a problem with ANY bailout not being provided without detailed plans on how the money is to be used. And there should be provisions that disallows bonuses or any other type of "reward" payout to employees of these companies! Shame on us and AIG for allowing this to happen! End of story!

So...Spring is here, at least the calendar says it's so! It's still cold, but most of the snow has disappeared around here. My lawn is a mess from the winter, and going to require a lot of work to get it back into shape. No problem, an annual project that I've become accustomed to facing. Now I'm just waiting for some warmer temperatures to be able to get outside and spend some time getting things ready.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, another week has come and gone, and just when we figured that we couldn't get any more screwed over, this thing about AIG bonuses comes out. I, like you, am pretty steamed about it. I mean, here we are paying billions in taxpayer dollars to a company that is.. too big to fail. So far, AIG has drawn a total of 122.8 BILLION dollars from the bailout fund. BILLION with a "B"! Think about it.. that's almost \$400.00 from every man, woman and child in the country! And yet we can't allow this company to go under. "big" isn't

the reason we can't afford that. The reason is that they insure so many other companies against loss and have dealt these 'derivatives'... bundles of mortgages all tied up in a bow... so deeply into the business world that, if they go under, the lion's share of the economy is going to follow them.

Now, I hear one guy sitting back saying, "Yeah, right. How much worse could it get?"

The answer is 'PLENTY'. A failure like that would bring the economy to a dead halt. It would be WORSE than the Great Depression, and last longer and be much more expensive too. Yes, even more expensive than bailing out AIG and CitiBank and GM.

The problem, as I've been saying for years, is that your mortgage is no longer a mortgage as far as the bank is concerned. It's just a number in a column on a ledger that adds to their balance to make their stock look good, or a commodity to be sold as part of a 'grab bag package' to investors. They're betting that you won't default on your mortgage and, just in case you do, they've taken out insurance against the financial loss. Care to guess who they get that insurance from? Anyone? Anybody at all? You, you in the back there with your hand raised?... Yes, that's right... American International Group... AIG.

And as foreclosure rates rose, they had to pay out. And as the housing market slowed and real estate values fell, they couldn't keep bringing in the revenue to pay off their customers. Their revenues plummeted as their payouts went sky-high. You don't have to be a business major to see what happens then.

But on the other side of the fence, regular small-town banks are having trouble getting capital to offer mortgages and loans. Their interest rates are still fairly high, and anyone with any sense is very careful about lending money right now.

There are, of course, those institutions who've taken bailout money and not put it onto circulation. That way they get to make their balance sheets look good and get themselves "cheaper money". Well that's just plain wrong. You got that money to help out the economy, not to make yourself an attractive buy-out target. I expect to see these institutions loosen up and start lending money in another month or two, once they see that competition for GOOD mortgages is heating up.

Now, we've also got this issue of bonuses. Yeah, it ticks me off that one company could put out 165 million dollars not in salaries, but in BONUSES, while having just accepted BILLIONS of dollars in bail-out money. But the bonuses were assured before the bailout was even envisioned. There isn't much we can do about that other than to specify that the company must document where every dime of bailout money goes.

And this new law to tax bonuses at 90% or 100%? It's just wrong. That's abusing the system. The Constitution says two things that apply here: First, that you can't make a law against something and then charge someone who did that thing before the law was passed. Second, you can't make a law to fit just one person or situation.

Getting that bonus money back by taxing it away from them is just not what we're about. It's using the law and the legal system as a weapon. And the law should be a shield, not a sword.

So what do we, as 80% shareholders in AIG, do? Well, the only thing we really can do now is to look to the future; make sure that things like that don't happen again. There should also be management shake-ups. Not that 'Liddy' guy.. he's actually trying to make things better.. but a lot of these executives who look at a situation only to figure out how to wring the most money out of it should have to go. We should superglue bells to their necks so that everyone would know who and what they were. [grin]

Now, in a lot of ways, GM has the same problems as AIG. They counted on unsustainable growth and made little provision for things like a tough economy or the gas crisis or a credit crunch. GM forgot that their product was automobiles and concentrated more on making their stock look good. Their product became their stock, not their autos. Cars and trucks and SUVs became just a necessary step toward their ultimate goal. When that happens, bad things follow.

I'm also tired of hearing people (some people, especially fat, drug-addicted deaf radio talkshow hosts and producer-seducing phone-sex freak television 'newscaster' types) blame the new administration. Yeah, the worst of this situation is going to come during this administration... and I don't think we've quite seen the worst of it yet. But imagine an airplane going along out over the ocean. All of a sudden, the pilot puts the plane into a vertical dive.. nose-dives the plane right toward the water. 1,000 feet from impact he leans back and takes his hands off the wheel, looks at the copilot and says, "here, it's all yours"... who are you going to blame for the crash?

Well, I've bored you enough with my ramblings. Let's take a look at what's going on in the NewsGroup.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Robert Bernardo posts this about a new online forum:

"Paul Quirk has created a new web forum for users of classic computers. Go to <http://retro-link.com> to see the opening message or to <http://retro-link.com/smf/> to browse. To sign up, send an e-mail to [paul\(at\)retro-link.com](mailto:paul(at)retro-link.com)

According to Paul, Retro-link.com will be different. This is what he says --

"There will be a new site for enthusiasts of retro computers... It will include other retro computer systems, as demand warrants. That site will be called retro-link. The domain, which has been registered, is at retro-link.com. I intend to have it ready and open to the public this weekend.

The theme will be a mature, friendly, harassment-free place where people can contribute as much or as little as they wish. It will be a positive place where people can post questions that have been asked a hundred times without being insulted for doing so. It will be less of a repository of information, and more of a social place to gather and discuss...

The forum seems to be all-encompassing in its eight categories -- General, 8-bit Commodores, Amiga, Atari, Apple, Tandy/TRS-80, Vintage PC, and Others."

Jim DeClercq posts this question about networking Atari machines:

"Somebody has done this before, probably, so I thought I would ask first. I want to run a serial link between a TT030 and a Stacy, and both of them run some sort of TCP/IP link.

The complication here is that a TT030 has five serial ports, while other things have just one. How does one set that up, using MiNTnet on the TT030 and STing on the Stacy?

If I figure this out before I am handed a working solution, I will of course post it here, but I am hoping for the least work way of doing what I need to do."

'Phantom' tells Jim:

"I'm in the processing of doing something similar myself. Using a STacy, MSTE, Falcon.

I had some success with the MIDI ports. The Midi software I was using was a older shareware program and all you need is MIDI cables. I forget the name at the moment as I was trying a bunch of MIDI software out at the time. But I think it on the UMICH site. MidiNet, MidiCom, something like that. I had no trouble with transferring text in real time. But ran into a problem with file transfer, I couldn't access the drive partitions on one machine from the other. I think I know what I did wrong, and will test it before I will go into it. But I think it was a simple mistake. The program I used Runs as a ACC. and there is only 2 or 3 files in all.

If I understand what you are trying to do, it may work to use the MIDI ports for a link between the computers and then use STing to connect to the Net.

The problem with doing it all with Serial ports would be getting the TT to use two serial ports at the same time. If you want it all working at the same time. I've a MSTE so it's somewhat similar situation as the TT. I use STing on all my Ataris, except for STalker for BBS related.

One option may be to use a null modem link between the STacy and the TT using something like STalker while connected to the Net with STing on the TT with another port. I've not tried this myself yet, but headed that way.

The thing about MIDI however is that you can in theory connect around 250+ Ataris together at the same time. But may be to slow for your needs. Some say MIDI transfer is about like a floppy drive. However I have read that it's faster than that, so I really don't know about how fast it is with file transfer. I would think drive speed would come into play in either case.

I've not fully explored what STing can do, there is a STing Server. And STing has drivers for all the ports if I'm not mistaken. STing may actually be able to do what you want all by it's self. I've never

gotten into using it with 2-3 ataris yet. Another project to look into.

If you get good results, do let me know and I'll do the same soon as I have time to work on it. Been doing some hardware work lately."

Henk Robbers posts this about his AHCC compiler:

"There is a new version of AHCC available. (see sig)

Changes:

- AHCC now detects and inhibits infinite recursions during macro expansion. (v3.b1 crashed)

- Fixes in relative path handling.
- More flexible handling of shel_find result.
- Built in macro `__FILE__` changes `'\'` to `'\\'`.

Have fun."

Then he posts:

"For those who already downloaded the last AHCC.

Please do it again.

There is a last minute fix and I forgot a few files.

Apologies for the inconvenience."

Francois Le Coat tells Henk:

"Thanks for your work. I'll probably have a few remarks to tell you about building my own software, if it's not disturbing your quietness. I'm always so worried about miss-commenting the hard work of another ATARI developer, because I'm one for so long. For 12 years now with my Hades 60. I tested AHCC with <http://eureka.atari.org/miniPack.zip> for the moment. Thanks for your good comments about it, and for ARAnyM.

Anyway, at first sight it look like a really good job, indeed.

Be sure I won't let the devels down, thanks to your support."

Henk replies:

"Hm, I am not sure what to think of this.

I am aware of the fact that compiler writing is a delicate job. So I am prepared for the worst. [wink]"

Jo Even Skarstein adds:

"I'm in the process of rebuilding my Milan. When it's done, you can expect some bug-reports from me as well ;-) I have lots of code developed with PureC that I can test."

Janco's Mike Hickey recently repeated his claim that Sony's going to drop the PS3's price "by next month." But Sony's still losing about \$50 per PS3, according to Business Week, which pegged Sony's costs at \$448.73 per system as recently as December 2008. If Sony dropped the retail price of the PS3 by \$100, they'd increase their per unit losses by nearly a quarter, from 11 to 33 percent.

The internal business cosmology of economic indices that ultimately dictate when Sony drops the PS3's price - and by how much - are impossible to estimate in a planning capacity. At some point Sony's manufacturing costs will drop sufficiently and the internal bean counter fiscal financial minimums will align with some executive's "tolerable losses" formula, thus setting the cogs and wheels cranking on a price "event" announcement.

Speaking of events, GDC 2009 is next week in San Francisco (we'll be covering it here through Game On). Could GDC be the event Janco's hinting at?

Or will Sony wait until E3 2009 in June?

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Web Founder Fears 'Snooping' on the Internet

Tim Berners-Lee, one of the founders of the World Wide Web, said Friday that he was concerned about the emergence of user profiling on the Internet and "snooping."

"The fact that when information travels across the web it isn't interfered with, snooped or molested, is very important," said Berners-Lee at an event here to mark the 20th anniversary of the first proposal to create the web.

Berners-Lee, who is director of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), that guides its technological development, pointed to new systems that can automatically detail a person's online habits and build up their profile.

"That sort of snooping is really important to avoid," he added.

The British computer science professor and guru underlined that one of the biggest challenges is to ensure that information available online is used transparently for the specific purpose that its owner intended or consented to, avoiding privacy pitfalls.

"Technologies are also coming that will be able to distinguish the appropriate use of data," he explained, underlining that the Internet "is a cloud."

US computer technology giant Google on Wednesday launched a test version of a new "interest-based advertising" system for its network of websites including YouTube, the company said in a statement.

The new system is designed to record the interests of users based on the pages they view and Internet searches they conduct, offering tailor-made

advertising offers to match which can then be further refined by the user.

Berners-Lee did not refer to Google directly.

A growing number of Internet firms encourage people to rely on applications offered online as services "in the cloud" instead of buying software then installing and maintaining it on their own machines.

While the trend toward cloud services is growing, some still worry about the privacy of data kept online and whether it is shrewd to rely on the Internet for access to information and applications.

There are also concerns about the degree of government surveillance of the online world and the potential for misuse.

Australian Internet 'Blacklist' Prompts Concern

A whistle-blower organization claims a secret list of Web sites that Australian authorities are proposing to ban includes such innocuous destinations as a dentist's office.

Australia's government denied that the list - published by renegade Web site Wikileaks.org - was the same as a blacklist run by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, or ACMA. However, a manager at the dentist's office said the ACMA had confirmed her site's inclusion on the ban list.

Wikileaks' publication of the list this week reignited a debate over whether a government proposal to impose an Internet filter for all Australians could have unintended consequences for innocent businesses.

The list in question is provided to the creators of Internet filtering software that people can opt to install on their computers. But Communications Minister Stephen Conroy has proposed mandating that Australian Internet service providers implement the list, which would make Australia one of the strictest Internet regulators among democratic countries. Several Internet providers are conducting trials of the filter through June.

The authority says the list largely contains the addresses of Web sites promoting child pornography and sexual violence, but it has refused to release its contents publicly.

The proposal has prompted protests across the country, with critics slamming it as censorship. Internet providers argued that a filter could slow browsing speeds, and pointed out that illegal material such as child pornography can be traded on peer-to-peer networks or chats, which would not be covered by the filter.

On its site, Wikileaks accused Australia of "acting like a democratic backwater," and said "Australian democracy must not be permitted to sleep with this loaded gun." The site - which casts itself as an outlet for "untraceable mass document leaking and analysis," with a focus on exposing oppressive regimes and unethical behavior - did not explain how it obtained the purported blacklist.

The list published on Wikileaks contains around 2,400 Internet

addresses, many of which are clearly for child pornography. But the list also includes a dental office, online poker parlors, a kennel and a school-cafeteria consultancy firm.

Kelly Wilson, a manager at Dental Distinction in the Australian state of Queensland, said she had no idea her office's site had been blacklisted until a newspaper reporter informed her Thursday. Wilson contacted the ACMA, which she said confirmed the site was on the authority's blacklist. She said she was offered no explanation why.

The site was hacked more than a year ago, and visitors were temporarily redirected to an adult Web site. The office quickly switched to a different Internet provider and hasn't had a problem since, she said.

"We're a little annoyed that we're on there," Wilson said. "It's a great Web site."

Jocelyn Ashcroft, owner of Tuckshop and Canteen Management Consultants in Queensland, whose apparently innocent site was also included on the Wikileaks list, worried that her business could be hurt.

Ashcroft said she contacted the ACMA after learning of the Wikileaks list and was told her site was not on the authority's blacklist. But since the blacklist is secret, she was unsure what to believe.

Australia's government and the ACMA slammed the publication of the Wikileaks list as irresponsible and denied it was the same as the official blacklist.

In separate statements, the ACMA and Conroy, the communications minister, acknowledged that the official blacklist and the version published by Wikileaks contained sites common to both lists. But Conroy said several addresses on the published list have never appeared on the official blacklist.

While the published list contains about 2,400 Internet addresses as of Aug. 6, 2008, the official blacklist for the same date contained around 1,000, the ACMA said. The ACMA said its blacklist has never contained 2,400 sites.

Conroy said the ACMA was investigating the publication of the list and was considering handing the case to the Australian Federal Police.

Jim Wallace, managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby, which supports the Internet filter, said the questions surrounding the published list had done nothing to change his opinion.

"It's going to take time to develop any system and the processes that surround it. We don't know at what stage of investigation these names on the blacklist were," he said. "It's a real shame that people can - through illegal means - challenge something which is purely and simply aimed at giving children a safer experience on the Internet."

IBM in Talks To Buy Sun Microsystems

IBM Corp. is in talks to buy Sun Microsystems Inc. for at least \$6.5 billion in cash, a deal that would shake up Silicon Valley and the

corporate computing market, The Associated Press has learned.

A person familiar with the situation told the AP of the negotiations, confirming an earlier report Wednesday in The Wall Street Journal. This person spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks are ongoing.

The Journal cited unnamed people familiar with the matter and said the deal could occur as early as this week.

The report sent Sun shares soaring \$3.92, up 78.9 percent, to close at \$8.89 Wednesday. IBM shares fell 96 cents, or 1 percent, to \$91.95.

Armonk, N.Y.-based IBM and Santa Clara, Calif.-based Sun both make computer systems for corporate customers. A purchase of Sun could help IBM in the finance and telecommunications markets as it tries to expand its role in digitizing key pieces of infrastructure, from electric utilities to water supplies.

While some of their technologies and customers overlap, IBM and Sun have been heading in different directions for most of the past decade.

Sun, a darling of the dot-com era, has been struggling since the tech bust of 2001 to find its place. The company has cut thousands of jobs and tried to refocus on open-source software besides the proprietary systems it built much of its wealth on.

IBM, after an enormous restructuring in the 1990s, has proven one of the technology industry's most reliable earners. It has gobbled up dozens of companies in recent years. But a \$6.5 billion deal would be its biggest to date.

It would represent a big premium for Sun, which closed trading Tuesday with a market capitalization of less than \$4 billion. However, Sun's last quarterly report shows it with more than \$2.6 billion in cash and securities that could be readily converted to cash.

Dell Unveils World's Thinnest Laptop

Dell Inc unveiled its "luxury" Adamo laptop on Tuesday, calling it the world's thinnest notebook as it seeks to compete in the high-end ultraportable market defined by Apple Inc's MacBook Air.

The sleek, aluminum-encased notebook is 0.65-inches thick and comes with a 13.4-inch screen and a 128-gigabyte solid-state drive. Shipping begins on Tuesday.

Starting at \$1,999, the Adamo is positioned as Dell's new high-end brand. Another configuration will sell for \$2,699.

The device comes packed in a clear case along with an optional branded sleeve or tote bag from designer luggage and handbag label Tumi.

The Adamo is meant "to make a design statement, to surprise people that this is a Dell," said marketing executive John New. "This is for the customer that has that discerning taste, and is willing to pay a little more for that."

Dell has been working to generate buzz for Adamo, Latin for "to fall in love with." Word of the PC began to leak late last year, and the company hosted an event in January in Las Vegas where it provided a fleeting glimpse of the laptop as it was held aloft by a model.

Apple helped launch the so-called ultraportable category last year with MacBook Air which, at 0.76 inches, previously laid claim to the title of world's thinnest.

The Adamo at 4 pounds is heavier than the Air, which weighs 3 pounds and is priced from \$1,799.

Most PC makers, including Lenovo Group, Hewlett Packard Co and Sony Corp also sell ultraportables.

Dell has been trying to reinvigorate its consumer brand amid efforts to diversify its revenue base. Business customers make up around 80 percent of Dell's revenue, while PCs account for roughly 60 percent.

Last week, Dell launched the \$799 Studio One 19, a touchscreen all-in-one PC meant for family use in the kitchen or the living room. The Studio One 19 will be available first in Japan and then in other countries later in the spring.

Dell shares have slid 13 percent since the start of 2009, while Apple's have jumped 12 percent. Dell, however, has outperformed Hewlett-Packard, whose stock has dropped 20 percent since the year began.

Microsoft Releases Internet Explorer 8

Microsoft is set to publicly launch Internet Explorer 8 early on Thursday, the latest version of its market-dominating Web browser.

The application, an integral part of Microsoft's eagerly awaited Windows 7 operating system, can be downloaded from Microsoft's website from 9 a.m. Pacific time, free for people using licensed Microsoft operating systems.

IE8, as it is commonly referred to, has been in public beta testing for about a year, but Thursday's launch marks its full public rollout.

Microsoft, the world's largest software company, said IE8 will run with Windows Vista, its latest operating system, and also Windows XP, the previous version which some users still prefer over Vista.

The application replaces IE7, which has a lock on the browser market. According to a recent survey by IT consultants Janco Associates, Internet explorer has a 72.2 percent market share, ahead of the Mozilla Foundation's Firefox browser with 17.2 percent. Google's new Chrome browser has only 2.8 percent of the market, while Apple's Safari has less than 1 percent.

Microsoft has run afoul of U.S. and European antitrust regulators for bundling its browser with its operating system, which competitors say is an attempt to drive them out of the market.

Last month, Google joined Mozilla and Norway's Opera in protesting

Microsoft's dominance in the browser market. In January, European regulators brought formal charges against Microsoft for abusing its dominant market position by bundling its Internet Explorer Web browser with its Windows operating system, which is used in 95 percent of the world's personal computers.

Microsoft has already announced that users of Windows 7 - expected later this year or early next year - will be able to turn key programs like Internet Explorer off, making it easier to use other browsers.

New features in IE8 include right-clicking on addresses or other Web features to go straight to a map or put into a blog or other website, which Microsoft calls an "accelerator". Users will also be able to put in keywords in the address bar to recall sites visited related to that word.

The new browser also has enhanced security protection, for example warning users if they are about to download something from a site known to be a source of malicious software, or "malware".

Ballmer Reiterates Interest in Yahoo Talks

Microsoft Corp. Chief Executive Steve Ballmer is still signaling an interest in a deal to buy part of Yahoo Inc.

Ballmer said at a technology and media summit Thursday in New York that a deal would help improve Microsoft's Web search business by expanding the base of users. More people using the search engine means more advertisers. And, Ballmer says, a larger pool of advertisers will allow for more tailored ads next to search queries.

Ballmer said he has had only one conversation with Carol Bartz since she became Yahoo's chief executive in January. Ballmer said he congratulated her and said he'd like to chat at some point about a possible deal.

Bartz's predecessor as Yahoo CEO, Jerry Yang, rebuffed a \$47.5 billion takeover offer from Microsoft last year. Since then Microsoft has said several times it would be open to a deal involving the companies' search engines.

Meanwhile, Microsoft has continued to develop its own search technology as it struggles to catch up with Google Inc. and Yahoo. The internal name for one of Microsoft's new search concepts is Kumo, which has prompted some quizzical comments and sneers since it was leaked in a staff memo. It probably will not be known as Kumo when it goes public, Ballmer indicated Thursday. "We need a name," he said.

IE8, Safari, and Firefox All Fall in Hacking Test

Day One of the CanSecWest Pwn2Own hacking contest finished Wednesday, with fully-patched copies of IE8, Safari, and Firefox all falling to hacker "Nils".

IE8 and Firefox took longer than Safari, which fell in seconds,

according to reports from CanSecWest where the Pwn2Own contest is held. Earlier today we reported on the agenda and final rules for the contest.

Pwn2Own is a live hacking contest at which many of the best security researchers in the world attempt to crack the products you run every day live for cash prizes. Actually, in this case some of the versions of products are a little ahead of what you run, just to make it as challenging as possible.

On a Sony Vaio running Windows 7 the following browsers will be attacked: IE8, Firefox, Chrome, followed by the Safari and Firefox browser running on a Mac.

On day 1 of the contest, hackers must attack a default installation with no added plugins. On day 2 Flash, Java, .Net, and QuickTime are added and the "attack surface" is much greater. On day 3 popular apps such as Acrobat Reader are added. For these browser tests, success means code execution within context of the application.

Success is defined as either "loss of information (user data)" or "incur financial cost".

For his exploits Nils won a cash prize and the Sony Vaio used in the contest.

A Hacking Tool Gets Updated for the Mac

Two well-known Mac hackers are updating a widely used hacking toolkit, making it easier to take control of a Macintosh computer.

Over the past few days, the researchers have been quietly adding new software to the Metasploit toolkit, used by security researchers and criminals alike. Metasploit already supported Mac attacks, but until recently the Mac code hadn't been as good as Metasploit's Windows and Linux tools, said Dino Dai Zovi, an independent security researcher who talked about the new tools with his collaborator Charlie Miller at the CanSecWest conference Friday. "Our goal was to make Mac OS X a first-class target for Metasploit."

Metasploit is an open-source toolkit that makes it easy for hackers to launch a barrage of attacks against a computer system.

Miller and Dai Zovi earned fame in previous years for hacking Macintosh computers at CanSecWest's annual Pwn2Own hacking contest. On Wednesday, Miller, a researcher with Independent Security Evaluators, won US\$5,000 and a Mac laptop by using a previously unknown Safari vulnerability to hack into a Mac system.

The hack was done before contest organizers. In an interview, Miller said he had hoped to demonstrate it before an audience at CanSecWest, but was prevented from doing so because of Pwn2Own contest rules, which prohibit public discussion of bugs exploited in the contest.

Miller and Dai Zovi say their work is designed to bring attention to serious security problems in the Mac platform, which has largely avoided the wide-scale attacks that have plagued Windows for years. Dai Zovi said he considers the Mac safe, but not secure. "There's a difference

between safety and security," he said. "It's like leaving your door unlocked. ... Leaving your door unlocked is always insecure, but it may or may not be safe."

At the show, the researchers demonstrated several payload programs they have developed for Metasploit, including one called "Pic the Vic," which can be used to snap a photograph of a Mac user who has been hacked, using the computer's camera.

They have also ported a Windows tool, called Meterpreter, to the Mac. Meterpreter is a stealth tool that can be used to gain information from and import more software onto a hacked computer.

In the next few days they plan to add exploit code to Metasploit for a handful of previously patched Mac software bugs. Exploit code must be used to first hack into the computer before any payload software can be installed.

Although there are still many more exploits available for Windows software than for Macs, the new payload code means there is now "more or less the same functionality if you want to target a Mac box or a Windows box," Miller said.

What Lawsuit? Psystar Offers Third-Gen Mac Clone

Seemingly unfazed by Apple's lawsuit against it, Psystar on Tuesday pushed forward with its latest Mac clone.

Psystar has phased out its minitower for a smaller form factor with more powerful processor options. The third-generation Open Computer, called the Open(3), uses Intel's E7400 Core2Duo running at 2.8 GHz as the default processor. That makes the new Mac clone more than 50 percent faster than previous generations.

Michael Gartenberg, a vice president at Interpret, questioned the wisdom of purchasing a Mac clone instead of a genuine Mac. "You are not getting something significantly cheaper or something that is going to significantly perform better," he said. "You are likely buying something that is going to be incompatible with anything Apple does in the future. And you are going to be depending on a company that really hasn't been around very long for technical support."

It's not clear how many Mac clones Psystar has sold, but it's clear that the company seems intent on producing the machines until a court makes it stop. It keeps developing new and improved models.

An Intel Core2Quad option for the Open(3) aims to enhance performance in computationally intense applications such as 3-D rendering and movie editing. Rudy Pedraza, president of Psystar, said a quad-core in a desktop that is less than four inches thick is the direct result of feedback the company has received from the public. At 47 percent smaller, the company said the new chassis improves space efficiency and versatility by using either a standard PC pedestal or horizontal placement.

"We are making the Open Computer a better fit for our users' environments in more ways than one," Pedraza said. "The smaller size will definitely make it easier to place in a home or small office, but,

at the same time, the increased performance will allow it to easily take the place of traditionally sized machines."

Beyond the chassis and processor, the Open(3) also revamps the hard drive and memory. The standard configuration now has a 500GB SATA hard drive and a GeForce 8400GS video card with 256MB of dedicated video memory. Buyers can choose to add an 802.11n wireless adapter, a Firewire card, and an all-in-one card reader that reads popular removable media such as SD cards, CompactFlash and Sony's Memory Stick.

Psystar said it also refreshed the OpenPro offering with the most-requested custom options, including a Rackmount chassis and bootable RAID support. The standard configuration now includes a 1TB SATA hard drive, 8GB of system memory, and a dual-DVI GeForce 9500 video card with 512MB of video memory.

The new computers use Apple's Mac OS X. Prices start at \$599 for the Open(3) and \$1,154 for the OpenPro exclusively from Psystar's online store.

Psystar says it has a right to make the Mac clones, accusing Apple of running a monopoly. Psystar accused Apple of forcing a tie between the Mac OS X operating system and Apple's hardware in the end-user licensing agreement. Psystar argued that Apple's EULA unlawfully restrained trade by barring users from installing its operating system on non-Apple hardware.

Judge William Alsup ruled that Apple didn't violate federal and state antitrust laws and dismissed those charges last November. Apple sued Psystar in July after the company started selling Mac clones. Apple's suit seeks to shut down the company, and Alsup's ruling puts Apple in a stronger position as that case progresses.

How To Tell, What To Do If Computer Is Infected

Computer-virus infections don't cause your machine to crash anymore.

Nowadays, the criminals behind the infections usually want your computer operating in top form so you don't know something's wrong. That way, they can log your keystrokes and steal any passwords or credit-card numbers you enter at Web sites, or they can link your infected computer with others to send out spam.

Here are some signs your computer is infected, tapped to serve as part of "botnet" armies run by criminals:

- * You experience new, prolonged slowdowns. This can be a sign that a malicious program is running in the background.
- * You continually get pop-up ads that you can't make go away. This is a sure sign you have "adware," and possibly more, on your machine.
- * You're being directed to sites you didn't intend to visit, or your search results are coming back funky. This is another sign that hackers have gotten to your machine.

So what do you do?

* Having anti-virus software here is hugely helpful. For one, it can identify known malicious programs and disable them. If the virus that has infected your machine isn't detected, many anti-virus vendors offer a service in which they can remotely take over your computer and delete the malware for a fee.

* Some anti-virus vendors also offer free, online virus-scanning services.

* You may have to reinstall your operating system if your computer is still experiencing problems. It's a good idea even if you believe you've cleaned up the mess because malware can still be hidden on your machine. You will need to back up your files before you do this.

How do I know what information has been taken?

* It's very hard to tell what's been taken. Not every infection steals your data. Some just serve unwanted ads. Others poison your search result or steer you to Web sites you don't want to see. Others log your every keystroke. The anti-virus vendors have extensive databases about what the known infections do and don't do. Comparing the results from your virus scans to those entries will give you a good idea about what criminals may have snatched up.

Gmail's 'Send Undo' Zaps Those 'Oh Crap!' Emails

Have you ever drunkenly emailed your ex- at 3 AM, professing your love? Maybe you've quickly replied to an obnoxious colleague, just a teensy bit too sarcastically?

Regret can be as quick as a hastily pushed "send" button. But, according to a new feature from Gmail Labs, sent emails can quickly be undone.

"Turn on Undo Send in Gmail Labs under Settings, and you'll see a new "Undo" link on every sent mail confirmation," Michael Leggett, a Google user experience designer, wrote in a blog post late Thursday. "Click 'Undo,' and we'll grab the message before it's sent and take you right back to compose."

Remember, the Labs icon is the little Erlenmeyer flask icon right to the right of your username, in the upper right-hand corner.

What this does, apparently, is delay the transmission of an email for about five seconds, giving you the chance to recall it. As Google notes, this doesn't /recall/ an email; it actually pulls it back, meaning that your embarrassing profession of love will actually never be seen. Just be quick!

Geek Replaces Lost Finger With 2GB USB Finger

You've heard of USB thumb drives, but you likely have not considered the real thing - a lost digit replaced by a USB Flash drive.

A Finnish programmer who lost his finger in a motorcycle accident has now replaced it with a prosthetic finger that has a USB drive built in.

Jerry Jalava can now peel back his "nail" and reveal a 2GB "finger drive" for storing photos, movies and software.

Jalava had his left ring finger amputated last summer after crashing into a deer with his motorbike near the Finnish capital Helsinki. Given his profession as a computer programmer, the doctors treating him joked that he should have a USB "finger drive" and Jalava went for the idea.

Jerry Jalava's 2GB USB finger looks like a normal finger, but it's detachable and he leaves it inside his computer's slot while using it. The Finnish programmer plans to "upgrade" his finger in the future with one that has a removable fingertip, an RFID tag and more storage space.

This time, Jalava's USB finger is not a hoax, unlike the story of the guy who surgically altered his thumbs two years ago for better use of his phone keyboard. To refresh your memory, that guy whittled his thumbs several times so that he could type faster on his Blackberry and then iPhone - and it proved to be just a PR stunt (or more of a Flat Earth News worthy tale).

Death Leaves Online Lives in Limbo

When Jerald Spangenberg collapsed and died in the middle of a quest in an online game, his daughter embarked on a quest of her own: to let her father's gaming friends know that he hadn't just decided to desert them.

It wasn't easy, because she didn't have her father's "World of Warcraft" password and the game's publisher couldn't help her. Eventually, Melissa Allen Spangenberg reached her father's friends by asking around online for the "guild" he belonged to.

One of them, Chuck Pagoria in Morgantown, Ky., heard about Spangenberg's death three weeks later. Pagoria had put his absence down to an argument among the gamers that night.

"I figured he probably just needed some time to cool off," Pagoria said. "I was kind of extremely shocked and blown away when I heard the reason that he hadn't been back. Nobody had any way of finding this out."

With online social networks becoming ever more important in our lives, they're also becoming an important element in our deaths. Spangenberg, who died suddenly from an abdominal aneurysm at 57, was unprepared, but others are leaving detailed instructions. There's even a tiny industry that has sprung up to help people wrap up their online contacts after their deaths.

When Robert Bryant's father died last year, he left his son a little black USB flash drive in a drawer in his home office in Lawton, Okla. It was underneath a cup his son had once given him for his birthday. The drive contained a list of contacts for his son to notify, including the administrator of an online group he had been in.

"It was kind of creepy because I was telling all these people that my dad was dead," Bryant said. "It did help me out quite a bit, though, because it allowed me to clear up a lot of that stuff and I had time to help my mom with whatever she needed."

David Eagleman, a neuroscientist at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, has had plenty of time to think about the issue.

"I work in the world's largest medical center, and what you see here every day is people showing up in ambulances who didn't expect that just five minutes earlier," he said. "If you suddenly die or go into a coma, there can be a lot of things that are only in your head in terms of where things are stored, where your passwords are."

He set up a site called Deathswitch, where people can set up e-mails that will be sent out automatically if they don't check in at intervals they specify, like once a week. For \$20 per year, members can create up to 30 e-mails with attachments like video files.

It's not really a profit-making venture, and Eagleman isn't sure about how many members it has - "probably close to a thousand." Nor does he know what's in the e-mails that have been created. Until they're sent out, they're encrypted so that only their creators can read them.

If Deathswitch sounds morbid, there's an alternative site: Slightly Morbid. It also sends e-mail when a member dies, but doesn't rely on them logging in periodically while they're alive. Instead, members have to give trusted friends or family the information needed to log in to the site and start the notification process if something should happen.

The site was created by Mike and Pamela Potter in Colorado Springs, Colo. They also run a business that makes software for online games. Pamela said they realized the need for a service like this when one of their online friends, who had volunteered a lot of time helping their customers on a Web message board, suddenly disappeared.

He wasn't dead: Three months later, he came back from his summer vacation, which he'd spent without Internet access. By then, the Potters had already had SlightlyMorbidity.com up and running for two weeks.

A third site with a similar concept plans to launch in April. Legacy Locker will charge \$30 per year. It will require a copy of a death certificate before releasing information.

Peter Vogel, in Tampa, Fla., was never able to reach all of his stepson Nathan's online friends after the boy died last year at age 13 during an epileptic seizure.

A few years earlier, someone had hacked into one of the boy's accounts, so Vogel, a computer administrator, taught Nathan to choose passwords that couldn't be easily guessed. He also taught the boy not to write passwords down, so Nathan left no trail to follow.

Vogel himself has a trusted friend who knows all his important login information. As he points out, having access to a person's e-mail account is the most important thing, because many Web site passwords can be retrieved through e-mail.

Vogel joked that he hoped the only reason his friend would be called on to use his access within "the next hundred years or so" would be if Vogel forgets his own passwords.

But, he said, "as Nathan has proven, anything can happen any time, even if you're only 13."

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